

## MWSS-274 Keeps Critical Base Operational

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3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Fwd) Public Affairs   

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CAMP DWYER, Afghanistan - There are no gun shots, no explosions, no confusion or chaos – only a thick, enveloping dust that mixes with sweat on exposed skin leaving a thin film of mud, and settles in the lungs making it difficult to breathe. This is Camp Dwyer, where a vast expanse of nothingness stretches to the horizon. The only activities across this deserted landscape are aircraft buzzing in and out and the Marines who live on this patch of desert, supporting the base.

Approximately 115 devil dogs with Marine Wing Support Squadron 274 live and work in this austere environment. Although they are not in daily fire fights or dodging improvised explosive devices, their work here building and maintaining the flight line is as critical to the war as the aircraft they support. Recently, the MWSS-274 Marines began a project to repair a portion of an expeditionary airfield here that supports the camp's main fueling point, which will soon see a flux of activity now that the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) has taken over for Marine Aircraft Group 40.

Ironically, in middle of this vast desert, the problem all started with water. Rain trapped under the matting that makes up the expeditionary airfield, mixed with dirt and formed pockets of mud. Pressure from aircraft taxiing across the flight line caused that mud to seep to its surface leaving small voids under the matting and creating dangerous debris. Slowly, the matt began to slant inward on the center taxi line, creating an uneven and unsafe surface. Because Afghanistan is dangerous enough, the MWSS-274 Marines decided to eliminate this additional hazard.

Approximately 20 Marines from the detachment spent a backbreaking day removing a section of matting that measured 580 feet long by 72 feet wide. The Marines then grated the soil, added gravel to help stabilize it and trucked in 1,500 90-pound bags of cement, which they unloaded and spread by hand.

The Marines then used a road grater to mix the cement with the top 4 or 5 inches of soil, used a water truck, sporting a 2,500-gallon tank, to wet the mixture and then used two compactors to pack it tight and remove air pockets. After the surface dries the Marines will use the road grater once again, let the surface re-harden and then replace the matting. The hard-working Marines will undoubtedly finish this estimated 17-day process a few days early.

Their handiwork will pay dividends. Not only did the Marines get hands-on experience that will aide them in future projects as 3rd MAW (Fwd.) extends its reach throughout Helmand province, it will also keep Dwyer, a strategic staging area for dispersing ground units and a perfectly placed refueling location for air assets, in the fight.

"This base is surrounded by hot spots, so we get a lot of infantry units stopping here before pushing out and we have a lot of aircraft who need to refuel so they can stay on station longer and be closer to where they are needed," said 1st Lt. Andrew "Mike" Lowry, the officer-in-charge of the detachment.

Even though they are living in a desolate region in Spartan conditions, thousands of miles from their families, they do it without complaint. Without these men, troop transports would be severely limited in the area, support aircraft would arrive later and have to leave earlier because of fuel issues and medical evacuation aircraft would lose critical time getting to and from calls. So, although they are not the trigger pullers on the front lines, they are an absolute and unarguable necessity in the war.